# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

APRIL 1941

DOCUMENTARY—THE CREATIVE INTERPRETATION OF REALITY

VOL 2 No 4 PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY FILM CENTRE 34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W1 FOURPENCE

61 NOTES OF THE MONTH

63 MASSACRE ON ALL FOOLS' DAY
*Annihilation of British Films*

64 THE CASE FOR DOCUMENTARY

67 NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

68 M.O.I. FIVE-MINUTE FILMS
*List for February and March*

69 DOCUMENTARY BOOKINGS FOR APRIL

70 ARE ACTORS NECESSARY?
*by Bernard Miles*

74 CORRESPONDENCE

74 FILM SOCIETY NEWS

75 A FRENCH FILM
*Circonstances Attenuantes*

76 NEWS FROM CANADA

77 EX PARTE
*by George Pearson*

78 NEWS FROM U.S.A.

## Facilities Please

IT IS TIME some authoritative action was taken regarding the difficulties and delays which are constantly being experienced by film-makers engaged on official propaganda work. It is very difficult to do any filming outside the studios without some sort of a permit, and most propaganda films are involved in locations which come under one or other of the Government departments. There are two causes for complaint. Firstly, that the machinery through which facilities are obtained is usually unnecessarily cumbersome. People are shuttled from one place to another; endless correspondence is entered into; and days—even weeks—of valuable production time are wasted. The second point mirrors the first, and is fundamental; there appears to be a complete failure on the part of many Civil Servants and Service personnel to realise the paramount importance of propaganda as a war weapon. Film people engaged on urgent work in the national effort are only too often regarded as unimportant nuisances, instead of being granted rapid and full facilities consistent with essential security. What is needed is a Cabinet ruling giving priority to all official propaganda work. Delays over a year must be the equivalent of several films which, with a more reasonable system, could otherwise have been made.

## Indian Protest

IT IS REPORTED that the appointment of Alex Shaw as Advisor on Films to the Indian Government has not been welcomed by

certain sections of Indian film circles. The monthly paper *Filmindia* attacks the appointment because its procedure was "fishy" and because it is another example of "the principle of preferential employment of foreigners". The paper goes on to add that Shaw "has a very agreeable personality and while being aware of his rank ignorance of Indian conditions he is sincerely anxious to learn—though his doing so will take years. We must therefore be prepared to . . . make the best of a bad job, to get at least some value for our money". We must point out to our Indian friends that Shaw's appointment (which incidentally deprived documentary here of one of its key figures at a very inconvenient moment) was generally approved in England as being a sensible effort to get the practical social and educational use of films started in India; and that Shaw's job is specifically to evolve a purely Indian organisation for this purpose. Even in feature films, India—despite its enormous output—can hardly be said to have distinguished itself; while in the educational field virtually nothing has been done. An acknowledged expert like Shaw should surely be welcomed rather more heartily than present reports suggest. We are certain, however, that other and possibly less vocal sections of Indian film opinion will be only too glad to co-operate with Shaw in his gargantuan but well worth doing job. In a country with such a high percentage of illiteracy the film possibilities are terrific; and it is possible that most of the opposition is coming from vested interests who are afraid that a non-theatrical system will encroach on their own market—an illusion which, even in this country, dies very hard.

## Lofoten and the Newsreels

THE SHOWING of a 5-minute film of the Lofoten raid one week after presentation by the Newsreels of the same material raises some interesting issues. Was the M.O.I. at fault in releasing the material to the Newsreel companies? It may be felt that, however inadequate the 5-minute version of the film was, the public would have waited quite happily for another week for the more matured presentation that one has come to expect from the Ministry. Actually the item issued by the Ministry differed in no respect from the Newsreel material except for "cut-in" material shot at Denham Studios by the Crown and Army Film Units. The Odeon, A.B.C., and G.B. Circuits may have had some sort of a case in refusing to show the Ministry's 5-minute version on the grounds that their audiences had seen the material in the Newsreels. On the other hand, it is open to question whether individual interests have the right to override the Government decision. Surely if the Government wish to present a certain view to the public by means of film, commercial interests should not seek to override this. Out of this debacle the Newsreel Associations are whipping up a campaign against official coverage of items such as the Lofoten raid or the Libyan campaign. They say that Newsreel cameramen could do the job as well, if not better. Yet the record of the British Newsreels has not been so inspiring in this war that they can demand monopoly in war reportage.

It is difficult to know how much either side is to blame; but most people will agree that the constantly strained relations between the M.O.I. and the Newsreels are regrettable. Can nothing be done to improve this situation?

## Better Be Dull

IT IS ENCOURAGING to be able to record that an unspectacular but very seriously retrograde step in the methods of the British informational services has attracted sufficient attention and protests to achieve a return to sounder practice. The B.B.C. has achieved an invaluable reputation throughout the world for the cautious accuracy of its news bulletins. This reputation was recently threatened by a departure from the objective reportorial manner to a style of presentation which resulted in the listener hearing, not the facts, but only a partial interpretation of them. In particular, the speeches of Axis leaders and Axis-tied statesmen were suppressed in favour of blistering or ironical editorial comment upon pronouncement which the listener had no opportunity of appraising for himself. It says much for the vitality of British democracy that many voices—that of the Editor of the *Spectator* most eloquent among them—were immediately raised to say that the British people preferred to hear for itself what Mussolini had said and could be trusted to form its own estimate of the significance of his words. Like most B.B.C. mistakes this episode would appear to have been the result of irresponsibility rather than considered policy, but whatever the reason it is a pity to get into a habit of unconsciously imitating the enemy. The B.B.C. has, however, made amends and it is to be hoped that the vital importance of preserving in our propaganda a clear distinction between fact and interpretation is now understood by all keen experimenters. It is to be hoped that they may also come to realise that to allow an announcer, by his inflexion, to colour the news with personal reactions to it is a sure way of casting doubt on its accuracy. The B.B.C. is perhaps a little oversensitive to the accusation of dullness. If the news bulletins are dull it is less often due to errors in presentation than to an unimaginative selection of items and a poverty of journalistic detail in the official communiquês. And better dullness than the suspicion of distortion. The B.B.C. must guard zealously the British reputation for accurate news, an international reputation which has been built up very largely by itself.

## Documentary Goes East

"DOCUMENTARY" is a sword which nowadays crops up in unexpected places and cinema exhibitors are even known to display it within sight of the box-office. Yet we must confess to a feeling of awe at the sight of the solemn syllables translated into Japanese script. Some early numbers of *The Documentary Film Review* have reached us from Tokio and we welcome this smartly produced and copiously illustrated monthly as a new link in a chain of documentary publications which is stretching steadily round the world. The stills published suggest that Japanese documentary production has achieved a high level of technical competence in somewhat conventional subjects but there is little guide to the nature of the ideologies involved. *Housing Problems* and *Baptism of Fire* are noticed with an equal and, no doubt, Oriental calm.

# MASSACRE ON ALL FOOLS' DAY

**A study of the new call-up orders of the Ministry of Labour and National Service, which are likely to destroy the British Film Industry**

THE NEW call-up schemes announced by the Ministry of Labour and National Service now establish as fact what was long quietly rumoured—that after April 1st no employee in the British Film Industry will be reserved under the age of 35. It has been computed (by the *Kine Weekly*) that 70 per cent of the film trade's key personnel will be affected by this new order. If, therefore, it is put into effect, the result will be, quite simply, the destruction of the British entertainment film industry.* One is forced to assume that this fact was taken into account by the Ministry of Labour (presumably without the agreement of the Board of Trade and the Ministry of Information, both of whom should be deeply concerned in such fundamental decisions), and that the authorities are looking with equanimity on the prospect of converting the remaining British film studios into Government storage dumps, on the extinction of all but Hollywood features from British screens, on the loss of prestige value now represented by British features shown overseas, and on the absence of any indigenous film industry in this country for many years after the war. If such a prospect has indeed been considered, it is clear that the case for the British Film Industry has not yet been made out to the satisfaction of Whitehall.

What then are the arguments against the elimination of Great Britain as a film-producing country? First and foremost we would claim that a flourishing indigenous industry is a vital national asset. It may have been true to say in the late 'twenties that most British films were raffish, cheap-looking, and largely inferior imitations of Hollywood "B" pictures. It may have been true to say in the mid-'thirties that the British production industry was strangling itself with gross financial inflation, unpardonable megalomania, and shady manipulations. And it is probably true to say that the industry as a whole has not yet recovered from the effects of the 1937 crash. But however pessimistic a recital of its sins may sound, one pertinent fact remains—during the past six or seven years we have been slowly developing a style or type of film which is as essentially British as Hollywood films are American, as the great German films were German, and as the French films were French. Even if this trend were represented by a mere handful of films—and it is represented by a good deal more than that—the value of a film-style and film-content expressive of national feelings and national character is something which is not lightly to be dismissed. In this connection it is noteworthy that it is with just those films which are so recognisably British that we gained a foothold in the U.S.A. circuits. To the old American aphorism, "A foot of film means a dollar's worth of trade" we might add, from our own point of view, "A good British film means a year's worth of goodwill". But there is more to it than considerations of prestige and propaganda values in overseas countries. British films fulfil their most important rôle at home. One has recently had a glimmer of hope that, just as the Elizabethan drama was a reflection and an expression of the English spirit of those days, so too we might build a British film style which would express the character of our present democracy in all its aspects. Such considerations are not to be sniffed at by highbrows, or by snobs who only see two or three films a year. Whatever their shortcomings, British feature films have already shown their native values; this is clear from any random list of films, such as *Pygmalion*, *Proud Valley*, *Edge of the World*, *Young and Innocent*, *South Riding*, *The Stars Look Down*, the Will Hay, Formby, Trinder and Crazy Gang series of comedies, and recent films like *Convoy*, *Gaslight*, *Freedom Radio* and *Quiet Wedding*. A random list, but one which cannot be gaily discounted by Whitehall.

These very real achievements are more than sufficient to offset the financial fiddling and petty bickering with which the film trade has not infrequently fouled its own street. No one indeed would yet claim perfection for British features as a whole; but there are enough concrete results, both here and in overseas markets, to make the prospect of a total smash absolutely tragic in its implications.

It is no use arguing that by means of heavy subsidies, various forms of protection, or even nationalisation, the film industry, once struck down, could be quickly put back on its feet after the war. Lost markets and lost goodwill depend on deeper factors than control; and, more important still, the personnel of film-making, in almost every department, represents a total of individual and collective experience based on long years of training and teamwork, for which no substitutes could be found for a very long time. Moreover, if you cut off your film-makers from their jobs—even for eighteen months—new developments in gear and technique may, indeed will, leave them ill-equipped and lacking in efficiency when and if they manage to get back to work.

Such are a few of the arguments which can be marshalled against the proposed destruction of the British Film Industry. Let us now examine what we may presume to be the Minister of Labour's point of view. It appears to be something as follows:—

"Films are entertainment. Therefore they come mainly under the heading of luxuries like confectionery, silk stockings and cosmetics. Therefore they must have the same treatment. I shall therefore classify them as an 'unprotected' industry, which means that they cannot escape from a higher age of reservation. I cannot in this national emergency start making elaborate distinctions between one non-essential industry and another, however small the man-power figure in this or that

*The case for Documentary is dealt with separately on page 64.

trade may be. And, in any case, there are enough American films to fill the home market for the duration; and a can of film doesn't take up much ship or Clipper space."

Meantime, it may be presumed that while the Minister of Labour wants men, the Treasury and the Board of Trade want foreign exchange, which our films can certainly bring them; while the Ministry of Information, though still sucking its fingers over the burns of *49th Parallel*, must, if it has any opinions at all, want to see as many good British films as possible carrying prestige messages to countries overseas.

Such is the political situation facing the British Film Trade as it reluctantly mounts the steps of the guillotine, an orphan of the storm wondering whether there is a Danton making ready for a last-minute ride to the rescue.

But the industry has got to find more than a rescuer; it has got to struggle with its executioners. It is possible that by the time these words appear the battle may have been won; we devoutly hope so. If it is, it will probably have been won on the recognition of some or all of the following arguments:—

(1) It is idiotic to class films as a non-essential trade. A lively national film industry is a national asset; it reflects, expresses and confirms the character, the achievements and the aspirations of the people. It is therefore as necessary at home as it is abroad.

(2) The new schedule affects film production particularly; because it is an art which depends on young people.

(3) Peak wartime production of features, etc., would involve the work of no more than 1,500 men, of whom about 400 are laboratory workers.

(4) Film-making needs long training and experience. Substitution is not a practical possibility in most film jobs.

(5) Out of the 1,500 men referred to, it is computed that a full 70 per cent would be affected by the new regulations.

(6) Even if women were substituted for men in certain departments (*e.g.* labs, editing, assistants, etc.), they could not be expected to reach efficiency in any technical work for some time; and in other departments (*e.g.* direction, photography, lighting, sound, etc.) they would be no better and no worse than substitute men over military age; in either case lack of knowledge and experience would be identically disastrous.

Such are some of the *ad hoc* arguments. But we need more than this. Now, in the final resort, we must have real unity in the Film Trade. This unity has seldom, if ever, been fully achieved even on major issues; but today (and for the duration) it is essential. The producers (and indeed the renters and exhibitors) should immediately come together, forgetting all previous squabbles, and should be prepared to pool their resources not only in campaigning but also, if need be, in production and distribution. At the time of writing this unity appears to be being achieved. The producers are meeting the authorities halfway with a plan for rationalisation on a wartime basis; they will thus be in a much stronger position than if they were to take up a purely negative attitude. They are showing that they have already found substitute labour wherever possible and practical. They are showing what economies in pooled resources and in studio space they have been able to work out. They will, it is hoped, reveal their long-term production plans, and the subjects must be top-liners not in costs but in national expression. They must give more recognition to the Unions. They must forget the bogey bogey attitude towards American interests over here; for by so doing they will gain support instead of losing their livelihood and their independence. And finally they must remember that their case depends more on quality and character in films than in cash profits; indeed, their case already rests on the fact that they are a part of the war effort which the nation can ill afford to lose.

The film industry is asking, not for preferential treatment, but for official inclusion in the national war effort. That inclusion would cost the Armed Services no more, and probably less, than fifteen hundred men.

# THE CASE FOR DOCUMENTARY

IN THE preceding article we have stated the case for the British Film Industry as a whole, and with special reference to the feature film aspect. The case for Documentary, while already covered by the arguments already stated, provides certain other points which need separate and serious consideration. The first point to be made is that documentary workers, unlike the majority of their colleagues in the Trade, are at present engaged on Government work to the extent of something like 85 to 90 per cent of their product. They are making films for the Ministry of Information, and through it for various other government departments; for the British Council; and for various Service departments. The second point—and one which has hitherto been widely misunderstood—is that it would appear that documentary workers not even excepting the Crown Film Unit are *not* automatically reserved when making Government films. The new call-up regulations apply to documentary film-makers equally with personnel in the studios and elsewhere. Hitherto, although a large number of key-men have already been called up, it has been possible to preserve some proportion of essential workers by means of the normal hand-to-mouth process of applying for temporary deferment—the period granted being usually 3 to 6 months. The question of deferment has loomed large in the documentary field because it is, in an industry which mainly depends on youth, a branch which is particularly youthful. Till now the reservation age for most key-workers has been 30; and even this age level has several times threatened the very existence of at least two of the most important documentary units.

The new regulation raising the age of reservation to 35 (with the likelihood of no reservation at all after July) means, if

it is fully carried out, the disappearance of all documentary film-makers from the field of production; for the average age of the whole movement is only 30. Even with some measure of temporary deferment it looks as though the effect of the new order will be to make the production of documentary films an impossibility. As the documentary medium has been chosen (for reasons which we shall examine later) to undertake the bulk of official propaganda and informational film work, the result will also be that the authorities will either have to fall back on the narrow and insufficient reserves of the newsreels, or to find some new machinery (a task in which we do not envy them), or to cease to use films at all.

It is not generally realised that while a Service department such as the War Office can without difficulty reserve, or obtain postponement for, key film workers who are not in uniform, the Films Division of the Ministry of Information has no such powers. Why this should be no one knows, unless the Films Division, from being the Pantaloon of Whitehall, has now been demoted to the status of Cinderella. In any case, the Films Division is one of the largest sponsors of propaganda films, and yet apparently has no real power to ensure a proper supply of personnel to make the films it wants.

The present output of documentary films directly in the national interest, if not interfered with, will probably average at least 2 a week for 1941, as opposed to 1 a week for 1940. As we have said, the bulk of this output is for official bodies; but there is, in addition, some valuable product financed by outside sponsors in the public utility field. The whole of this product is designed as a contribution to the war effort, and is almost always recognised as such by the Films Division, certain films having already been acquired by them for propaganda purposes, and nearly all of them being submitted for general approval before going into production. There are also certain films ordered officially by Dominion authorities. Thus the documentary movement may be said to be working full-time, full capacity, on films related to the war effort.

What does this represent in man-power, from the point of view of the Ministry of Labour? A careful check-up shows that the number of key-personnel needed to keep documentary production at its present output is as follows:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Producers and Supervisors .. .. .. | 14 |
| Directors .. .. .. .. .. | 29 |
| Assistants training as Directors .. .. | 5 |
| Cameramen .. .. .. .. .. | 24 |
| Script-writers .. .. .. .. | 2 |
| Editors, other than women already trained .. | 9 |
| Animators .. .. .. .. .. | 5 |
| *Total .. .. .. .. | 88 |

No persons under the age of 24 are included in the above list and out of the above total only 15 are above the age of 35 or are not eligible for military service for physical reasons.

It must, moreover, be added that the whole movement is working at a far higher pressure than in peacetime, and that five key-people have already been drafted to India or the Dominions on urgent work. This means that the loss of even one worker from the departments enumerated above is a matter of all the more gravity, particularly as the documentary approach is a specialised one and involves specialised training. It should also be added that postponement or reservation is not being asked for any but essential workers as indicated in the list already given. It must also be remembered that as far as documentary is concerned the question of substitute labour cannot really arise. As has already been made clear, the flow of documentary production has increased rapidly during the war; probably by as much as 25 or 30 per cent. Any new employees taken on are therefore needed to *add* to existing staff and not to fill the gaps left by departing personnel. Already the recent and rapid growth of the movement has led to the taking over of various people from the studios, but they, too, are equally liable to the new call-up orders. To a movement in urgent need of extra staff the question of substitution is not even academic; it simply does not arise.

The documentary movement represents a special expertness in the use of films for propaganda and informational purposes. For eleven years its members have been working to a thesis of public enlightenment which now fits closely to official needs; so much is this so that many things which documentalists have urged long and vainly now look like being created as a result of the war urgency. And films so far made make it clear that despite official inefficiencies, stupidities and delays, it has already been possible to put the accumulated creative knowledge of the documentary movement to good and practical use. Documentary, whether anyone likes it or not, is by its very nature the right medium for a continuous flow of films such as is envisaged and practised by organisations like the Ministry of Information Films Division. The documentary films so far made have spoken and are still speaking for themselves. *London Can Take It*, for instance, is the most successful short film ever distributed.

The question, therefore, is a simple one. Does the Government approve the policy of using films as part of its propaganda activities? If so, the new regulations can only mean it is cutting off its nose to spite its face. If not, then we must register violent protest at yet another example of our weakness in propaganda—a weapon which the Nazis, and the rest of the world, know full well to be as powerful as any other of the weapons of war.

To many documentary workers life in any of the Services would be a rest-cure compared to their present existence in a storm of difficult and exacting production problems and commitments. But they believe implicity and ferociously in the value of film as a propaganda weapon; and they know that their own skill is of special value, if not a necessity, in this field. They will not, without a struggle, see this weapon left to rust in the catacombs of Whitehall.

The Documentary Movement believes that in fighting for its own principles it is fighting for the general necessity of preserving the British Film Industry as a continuing creative factor in national and international life. As to the special problems of documentary set out above, it has a good case, a case which will be fought, and fought on the facts.

* A more generous estimate brings the total to 110—neither figure errs on the side of exaggeration.

# G.B.I.

ARE NOW MAKING

FILMS . . . IN

MODEL
COLOUR
DIAGRAM
DOCUMENTARY STYLE
INSTRUCTIONAL STYLE
MICROCINEMATOGRAPHY

. . . BASED ON TWENTY-ONE SUCCESSFUL YEARS OF PIONEERING IN

INSTRUCTIONAL FILMS



Another **VERITY** *film*

# "DAI JONES"

**Directed by DAN BIRT**

"Another good piece of film journalism is the Ministry of Information's "Dai Jones" . . . Every detail is tensely and simply shown with an emotion which never topples over." *The New Statesman & Nation.*

**VERITY** *films ltd.*

Managing Director: Sydney Box

GLOUCESTER HOUSE : 19 CHARING CROSS ROAD : W.C.2 : ABBEY 7421 & 5015

# NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

**Ack-Ack.** *Production:* Shell Film Unit for M.O.I. *Producer:* Edgar Anstey. *Direction:* Peter Baylis. *Photography.* Sidney Beadle. *Special effects:* Francis Rodker. 9 minutes.

THIS FIVE-MINUTER combines information and reassurance in a very neat manner. Its subject is a day (and particularly a night) in the life of an Anti-Aircraft crew; one of the gunners acts as commentator. The routine aspects are quickly got over in a brief introduction, and the film then concentrates on telling us the how and why of A.A. fire. This is made very clear by means of convincing and very simple diagrams; the point is clearly brought out that while a direct hit on a 'plane is always a pleasure, the basic value of A.A. fire is to force the bombers off their course, and to destroy any accuracy of bomb-aiming. A further point is that the A.A. barrage prevents a large number of bombers from getting through at all. Interlarded with these explanatory sequences are scenes in the living-quarters of the gun crew. These are done with a nice attention to naturalism and detail, with first-class sound-effects (including a clever piano-gag when the alert goes). Finally, we see the gun in action, a sequence which contains some really first-class model work. Altogether *Ack-Ack* is a thoroughly absorbing film.

**America Speaks Her Mind.** *Production:* March of Time. No. 11. Sixth Year. (General release.) *Distribution:* R.K.O. Radio Pictures. 19 minutes.

MARCH OF TIME'S latest edition is chiefly remarkable for its inclusion of a number of official German propaganda scenes which appear to make better British propaganda than German. Amongst them are pictures of serious damage done to German military objectives by British bombs and evidence of the sorry plight of civilians in occupied France. Whether the half-starved children are intended by German editors to prove that the British blockade is directed against French children or to illustrate the condition of Paris at the time of the French capitulation, will no doubt be made clear by future German productions. *Baptism of Fire* employed similar shots of the population of Warsaw to emphasise the value of the food which the kind conquerors brought with them to the fallen city. *America Speaks Her Mind* contains also some scenes of Hitler sight-seeing in Paris (on the Eiffel Tower with all Paris at his feet). As a sight-seer Hitler looks more like a human being than in all the more carefully staged bouquet-receiving and baby-embracing of earlier rôles.

The theme of *America Speaks Her Mind* is that the people of the United States, by exercising their democratic rights to differ amongst themselves on the question of aid to Britain, have arrived at a majority decision to support her, and this debated decision is a more powerful incentive to action than any mobilisation of public opinion possible under a dictatorship.

The isolationists are given a chance to state their various cases—Senator Wheeler (who is accorded the honour of a special reply by the President himself), "The Little Squirt", and a New York left-winger named Marcantonio all appear to call on Americans to keep clear of European entanglements. But the film is edited in accordance with the majority view, and there is considerably less doubt than is usual in March of Time controversies of where the publishers' own sympathies lie. The issue contains M.O.T.'s most exciting collection of material since *Inside Nazi Germany* and *Father Divine.*

**Dai Jones.** *Production:* Verity Films for M.O.I. *Direction:* Dan Birt. *Camera:* Roy Fogwell. 5 minutes.

MOST M.O.I. Five-Minute films tell a generalised story and many of them draw an obvious moral which has general applicability. *Dai Jones* does neither, but breaks promising new propaganda ground for the Ministry by selecting a very special episode from the story of an individual citizen. The film tells how an unemployed coal-miner from the valleys of South Wales comes to a city in search of work, and becomes an air-raid rescue worker because his special knowledge of tunnelling enables him to save a child trapped in a bombed house. For some reason no information is given as to whether there are many unemployed miners engaged in this vital work, or whether the authorities have any plan to organise them for the purpose, and the individual story is therefore left to stand on its own feet. This it does admirably. The style of presentation is, in places, melodramatic, and the exigencies of compression within the standard footage have resulted in a jerky continuity; but these faults are redeemed by Dan Birt's handling of his miner (a non-actor) and the authentic horror of the tunnelling sequence. The miner contributes a beautifully restrained performance, and the confined scenes of tunnelling are free of all the common faults of studio reconstruction.

It is, indeed, in the exterior scenes that the rescue work seems to lack the authentic atmosphere of painful expectancy or of simple curiosity, idle or morbid. Many people will be left with the devout hope that there are now no rescue parties as inexpert as that in the film before the fortuitous arrival of the miner.

**Yellow Caesar.** *Producer:* Michael Balcon. *Direction:* Alberto Cavalcanti. 24 minutes.

THIS IS A film about Mussolini, and by the time Cavalcanti has finished with him he certainly doesn't look too good. It is episodic—at times even scrappy—in its construction; a thing which is bound to be the case in a film composed of newsreel material with the addition of staged cut-ins. It is, in fact held together more by the ferociously sarcastic commentator than by the great ingenuity of the cutting. The cleverest thing about the film is the skill with which the staged sequences featuring Musso are matched with the newsreel clips. Other sequences include a shot of Douglas Byng as an appeasement-loving Dowager, trotting out the old story about how Benito made the Italian trains run to time; and the regular appearance of Radio Roma's female announcer, signalling each new act of aggression with the words "Mothers of Italy, be proud of your sons".

How nice it would have been if Cavalcanti could have made this film before, and not after everyone in this country made up their minds about Musso. But, in those days, the censors would hardly have passed it. As it is, *Yellow Caesar* is an amusing kick in the pants, though hardly as powerful as that being administered by General Wavell and his boys out East.

**World in Flames.** *Production:* Paramount News. *Producer:* Albert J. Richard. 70 minutes.

*World in Flames* is a 60-minute film made up of a series of, for the most part, excellent newsreel shots of a number of things that happened in the world between 1929 and 1939. The events appear to have been selected solely because they are of the stuff good film material is made of, but, unfortunately, the commentary makes no attempt to interrelate these incidents or explain their causes and effects. And, left to themselves, they prove absolutely nothing. Italy makes war on the Ethiopians, so we see shots of bombed Abyssinians, but where are Hoare and Laval? Civil war breaks out in Spain, so we see the poor people of Madrid rush in terror down the Tube station steps and the Alcazar goes up in smoke, but where are the business men of London and the politicians of France? In England, during those ten years apparently the most significant events were the changes in royalty, Mosley marching through the streets and the hunger marchers coming to town. Unfortunately for the success of what the film sets out to do, the events of real import which led up to the outbreak of the war in September, 1939, did not always lend themselves to filming, and the commentary fails lamentably to bridge the gap.

The voices of the commentators are harsh on the ear throughout most of the film. Arthur Menken's voice is a welcome relief, when it comes. He is to be congratulated, too, on always having someone around to film him filming his most spectacular shots. The other good commentating comes from Tom Chalmers of *The River*, but unfortunately he is given very little time. As violence after violence fills the screen and the raucous voices of the commentators rasp on, how grateful one is for two all-too-brief laughs—Count Grandi unsmilingly talking about "Italy's-a desire-a for-a understanding-a" and Mussolini being absurdly pleased with himself.

Many of the shots are first-class film material, collected from all over the world, wherever trouble was in the air. One realises how very brave newsreel cameramen must be, but how few of them know how to hold a camera steady.

**Lofoten.** *Production:* Army Film Unit and Crown Film Unit. M.O.I. 5 Mins.

*Northern Outpost* showed us what sort of shooting to expect from the Army Film Unit and *Lofoten* does nothing to alter that verdict. No doubt it was very difficult getting good stuff if the landings were carried out at night, and there is always the question of how much in the way of facilities for shooting the Unit was granted. But even allowing for these difficulties the stuff is badly shot. Bad camera set-ups, lack of close-ups, jerky or hesitant pans with no reason for panning, and an absence of any attempt at sequence or continuity in the shooting. All these would have been avoided by a good newsreel man or by anybody with experience or ideas in this sort of filming.

*Lofoten* was handed to the Crown Film Unit to edit, and they have done their best with music, seagulls and natural sound to knock some sort of life into it. But it still remains lifeless, and the commentary does very little to help. The affair is treated as a daring schoolboy prank, a pellet flicked at the headmaster while his back is turned—witness the saucy telegram despatched to Hitler. And lengthy shots of fluttering flags covered by music which seems to come from that ghastly quarter of an hour before the B.B.C. Sunday night news, aren't much help either. In spite of references to freedom and Hitler's new order, the whole effect of the film is not exciting and adventurous, but, just like Nazi war propaganda films, grey and oddly depressing. This effect is heightened by showing barrels of whale oil and cod liver oil being stove in and tipped into the sea: such propaganda is likely to turn against the people who use it.

**You're Telling Me.** *Production:* Paul Rotha Productions. *Direction:* Bladon Peak. M.O.I. 5 minutes.

*You're Telling Me* is another anti-gossip film, this time anti-bomb gossip. It differs from the earlier efforts in that ordinary people are shown reasonably sympathetically and not made out to be complete crooks or idiots, while the first-class passengers are the villains—nicely observed and rather cruelly revealed in all their comic pomposity.

But why it should be thought necessary or useful to make this sort of film beats me completely. The first-class compartment nitwits to whom it is addressed do not as a rule visit the pictures, and if they did, would not realise that it is applied to them. Personally I have always found third-class train bomb gossip astonishingly well informed and accurate. The real gossipmongers and rumour spreaders are the official bulletins with their "some casualties of which a few were fatal".

**War Front.** *Production:* Strand Films for Odhams Press. *Direction:* John Eldridge. *Camera:* Joe Jago. *Music:* Dr. Ludwig Brav. *Musical Director:* Muir Mathieson. 15 minutes.

BY MEANS of this film the sort of events compressed each week between the covers of Odhams *Illustrated* take on enhanced reality, and I suspect that next time I pick up the paper it's going to seem to me quite a bit more intimate and animate.

The planning of the paper presents a scene of imaginative zip and organisation. You get a notion of this from the film but, more importantly, you come to appreciate the lively connection between this side of the paper and the big mainspring of human activity which is coiled in the world well outside the editorial office. For the particular issue concerned, the editor (played by Bruce Belfrage) calls the lads together and spills the general idea. He says: let's see what's happening on the War Front—in the air—in the factories—in Civil Defence—on the Home Front. This is no small order, but the lads—a grand team of photo-journalists—go out for the answers. Each is specially assigned and each is looking for a picture story, all are looking for one thing—vivid human situations. To get some of the material demands long hours of patience, and frequently, when at last the chance comes, there are only three or four hectic seconds in which to select and record the vital shots. These boys certainly have a toughish and chancy time on location.

It is clear that in *Illustrated* the picture comes first, the story afterwards. This, by the way, is the reverse of common Fleet Street usage where, for example, the collecting of verbal facts about the bigamist precedes the quest for a copy of the first wife's wedding group.

*War Front* is a lively and workmanlike job. Incidentally, it makes one realise the importance of the contribution a picture paper can make towards the prosecution of the War.

# 5-MINUTE FILMS FOR FEBRUARY AND MARCH

| *Title* | *Theme* | *Director* | *Production Unit* | *Released* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Northern Outpost | The occupation of Iceland | Tennyson D'Eyncourt | Army Film Unit | Feb. 3rd, '41 |
| The Heart of Britain | The spirit of Britain | Humphrey Jennings | Crown | Feb. 10th, '41 |
| Telefootlers | Don't gossip on the 'phone | J. Paddy Carstairs | Verity | Feb. 17th, '41 |
| A-Tish-Oo | Combating the common cold | Jay Lewis & Max Munden | Verity | Feb. 24th, '41 |
| *India Marches | India's military effort | — | Bombay Talkies | Mar. 3rd, '41 |
| Dai Jones | A Welsh miner joins a rescue squad | Dan Birt | Verity | Mar. 10th. '41 |
| You're Telling Me | Don't spread rumours | Bladon Peake | Rotha Films | Mar. 17th, '41 |
| Lofoten | An eye-witness account by Lt.-Com. A. Kimmins of the Lofoten Raid | — | Army Film Unit | Mar. 24th, '41 |
| Mr. Proudfoot Shows a Light | Don't neglect your blackout | Herbert Mason | 20th Century Fox | Mar. 31st, '41 |

* A shortened version of *A Day with the Indian Army*, prepared by the Crown Film Unit.

# DOCUMENTARY AND OTHER BOOKINGS FOR APRIL

*(The following bookings for March are selected from a list covering its Members, supplied by The News and Specialised Theatres Association)*

| | Week ending |
|---|---|
| **America Prepares** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 12th |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 19th |
| **Atlantic Patrol** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 5th |
| **Britain's Youth** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 12th |
| **Buyer Beware** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | May 3rd |
| **Cavalcade of the Academy Awards** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | April 19th |
| **Charlie the Perfect Lady** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 12th |
| **Charlie by the Sea** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | May 3rd |
| **Disney Cartoon** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | April 5th |
| " " " " | 12th |
| " " " " | 19th |
| " " " " | 26th |
| " " " " | May 3rd |
| **The Domineering Male** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | April 26th |
| **Donald's Vacation** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 5th |
| **Don Donald** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 19th |
| **Ducks and Drakes** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 26th |
| **The Fair River: Maintain the Right** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 12th |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 12th |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 26th |
| **Faithful Forever** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 19th |
| **Father of a Family** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 12th |
| **Fiddlers All** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 12th |
| **Fishing in Hawaii** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 26th |
| **Five Faces of Malaya** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | 26th |
| **Forgotten Victory** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 5th |
| **Four and Twenty Fit Girls** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | May 3rd |
| **Four Thousand Years** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | April 26th |
| **Glass** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | 12th |
| **Going Places, No. 77** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 26th |
| **Going Places, No. 85** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | 26th |
| **The Hidden Master** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 5th |
| **Home Movies** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 19th |
| **How to Start the Day** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 26th |
| **Hungarian Rhapsody** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 5th |
| **Idol of Millions** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 19th |
| **Indian Durbar: King of Spades** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 5th |
| The Tatler Theatre, Chester | 12th |
| **An Inland Port** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 19th |
| **Is Idleness a Vice, No. 8** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 19th |
| **Isles of the East** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 19th |
| **A Job to be Done?** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 26th |
| **Keyboard** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 12th |
| **Know that Money** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Chester | 26th |
| **Lets Talk Turkey** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 12th |
| **Maintain the Right** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 26th |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | May 3rd |
| **Malta—Island Fortress** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | April 19th |
| **March of Time—No. 10** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 5th |
| **March of Time—No. 11** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | May 3rd |
| **XXX Medico** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Newcastle | May 3rd |
| **More Kittens: The Old South** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | May 3rd |
| **Pleasure Bound in Canada** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | April 19th |
| **Pluto's Dream House** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 5th |
| **Pluto's Dream House** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Leeds | 5th |
| **Point of View—No. 8** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 12th |
| **Prelude to Flight** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | May 3rd |
| **Raising Sailors** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | April 12th |
| **Romance of the Potato** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | 12th |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 19th |
| **The Roof of the World** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 19th |
| **Sea Scouts** | |
| The Tatler News Reel Theatre, Newcastle | May 3rd |
| **Shipbuilders** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | May 3rd |
| **Sixth Year—No. 10—March of Time** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | 5th |
| **Sixth Year—No. 11—March of Time** | |
| The News Theatre, Newcastle | May 3rd |
| **Stranger than Fiction—No. 71** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | April 5th |
| **Stranger than Fiction—No. 72** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 26th |
| **Suits Me** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 26th |
| **Treacherous Waters** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 12th |
| **Twelve O.P. Tempest over Tunis** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 26th |
| **20 Men and a Leader** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | 5th |
| **Unconquerable Minesweepers** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | 5th |
| **A Village in India** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 26th |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | May 3rd |
| **While America Sleeps** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | April 19th |
| **Window Cleaners** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 12th |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 12th |
| The Tatler Theatre, Leeds | 12th |
| The Tatler Theatre, Chester | 19th |
| **Wings of Youth** | |
| The Tatler Theatre, Manchester | 26th |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | May 3rd |
| **Workmates Going Places—No. 76** | |
| The News Theatre, Nottingham | May 3rd |
| **World Four** | |
| The News Cinema, Aberdeen | April 12th |
| **Young America Flies** | |
| The News Theatre, Leeds | 26th |


## ALWAYS UP-TO-THE-MINUTE

*An Entirely New Feature* dealing exhaustively with *Documentary Films* is now incorporated in the 1941 edition of

## The KINE YEAR BOOK

Of course, this new section detailing all the salient information connected with Documentary Films is additional to previous encyclopædic nature of the book, so comprehensive in data regarding this Industry. No matter what you want to know, what you want to buy or sell, you'll find the answer in the Kine Year Book, aptly described as The Red Guide. The ready reference to help every executive, now in its 28th year of publication.

*PRICE*
**20/-**
Special price to annual subscribers to the *Kinematograph Weekly*
**12/6**

**NOW ON SALE**

*All enquiries to:*

**KINEMATOGRAPH PUBLICATIONS LTD., 93 LONG ACRE, LONDON, W.C.2**

# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

MONTHLY FOURPENCE

VOL. 2 NUMBER 4

APRIL 1941

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER is issued only to private subscribers and continues the policy and purpose of **World Film News** by expressing the documentary idea towards everyday living.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER is produced under the auspices of **Film Centre, London,** in association with **American Film Center, New York.**



EDITORIAL BOARD

Edgar Anstey
John Grierson
Donald Taylor
John Taylor
Basil Wright

EDITOR

Ronald Horton



Outside contributions will be welcomed but no fees will be paid.

We are prepared to deliver from 3—50 copies in bulk to Schools, Film Societies and other organisations.

*Owned and published by*

**FILM CENTRE LTD.**
**34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON**
**W.1** GERRARD 4253


# ARE ACTORS NECESSARY?

**BERNARD MILES, the well-known stage and screen actor, discusses the existing and possible relationships between documentary film and professional actors. Before writing this article he made an intensive study of a large number of documentary films.**

AN INQUIRY into this question seems to me to involve an inquiry into the whole nature and purpose of documentary, past, present and to come. When I first undertook to attempt such an inquiry I confess that I thought it would prove fairly easy to make out a convincing case for the actor as against the non-actor. When I got down to it I found, not that a defence of the actor was a more difficult job than I had expected, but that the question I was trying to answer was not quite as simple as it looked, being somehow tied up with other issues of even greater importance to documentary film and to the future of the cinema itself. Time and space, to say nothing of my equipment, have not permitted a very comprehensive answer and I offer what follows with the greatest deference.

First of all, taking the question in its most obvious form, as a starting point for discussing the rival merits of actors and non-actors in documentary film, I would like to say a few words about the performances in *Housing Problems*, which provides much the most impressive examples that I have yet seen of work by non-actors. But in assessing the quality of their work as acting it seems to me that four very important points must be borne in mind. Firstly, the dialogue was more vivid and forcible than was ever given to any actor; full of wonderful repetitions "all on the crook" and "nothing straight", etc. Secondly, the director did not shout "cut" at the first little hesitation or fluff. The whole effect was therefore one of beautiful spontaneity. Thirdly, the stories had obviously been rehearsed scores of times, "with advantages", across the backyard, and were to that extent pure theatre. Lastly, about three-quarters of the quality of their performances (particularly from the women) sprang from the fact that the performers were doing something quite unfamiliar. There was a quality of uneasiness which came over like a ton of coals. If you wanted an actress to give the same sort of quality you would have to say to her something like this. "In this film we are aiming at a kind of raw journalism. So will you please try to forget that you are an actress accustomed to expressing yourself in front of a camera. Try to believe that you have never dreamed of doing such a thing and that you have only consented to do it after great persuasion, and that, even then, you are painfully out of your element. We intend, by bringing together the obvious truth of what you have to say with the fact that it is very unusual for you to make such an exhibition of yourself in order to say it, to achieve the exact quality which this kind of film demands."

I contend that, if a director were to explore in such terms the conditions of the work to be done, he could achieve with sensitive actors results every bit as moving and convincing as those in *Housing Problems*, the chief condition obviously being that he should ask the actor to embody as the chief ingredient in his image not "cockney-housewife-*ness*" but rather "out-of-element-*ness*". That is to say, that he should ask the actor to perform a sort of reversal of his very function as an actor.

I am not for a moment suggesting that *Housing Problems* should have been made with actors. That would be mad. It seems to me a tremendous achievement just as it stands, and one of the very high spots of documentary. In fact after seeing forty or fifty of the best documentaries I am still asking myself, "Why was the experiment of *Housing Problems* never repeated?" I only deal with it in such detail here because it provides some very excellent and much-discussed examples of non-actors, and therefore obviously falls within the boundaries of this inquiry.

I think that every film actor should be made to see *Housing Problems* two or three times every year, but I also think that it presents an overwhelming case for extending the experience of actors beyond the artificial confines of wood and canvas and distemper and coloured gelatine and all the fake values of present-day commercial Theatre and Cinema, into a world of hard reality. One of the lessons taught by such films as *Housing Problems* and *North Sea* and *Able Seamen* is that, if it has been possible for them to realise the issues involved, and, I suppose more important still, if it had been financially possible, the producers of documentary could have started a very potent realist movement in the English Theatre. They were the only members of the film or theatre world who were in close daily touch with reality, and who therefore had the opportunity to put a certain number of young actors and actresses into touch with it for the first time in their lives. Documentary had chosen as its battlefield the hard material world. But any young actor starting out on a career in theatre or films, found himself perforce surrounded, and usually overwhelmed, by a set of values so false and perverted that it required uncommon intelligence, stability and courage to resist them. Financial gangsters with with their attendant retinue of parasites, snob-

bery, insincerity and phoney behaviourism of every kind, fake, pose and a general atmosphere of smart sophistication, suggesting that "all the world is playing holiday"—that was, and to a great extent still is, the picture. Is it to be wondered at that the acting of about ninety-five per cent of the English stage lacked all reality or contact with Life? that it was largely a meaningless parade of technical tricks even more empty than the conventional sounding-brass technique of the old barnstormers? I suggest that if the documentary directors had been able to take and train even a dozen carefully chosen youngsters along the path that they themselves were so ably treading, to function credibly in a world where glamour and a few other entirely stupid factors are not the be all and the end all here, the results would have been startling. Such a group of youngsters trained to get themselves dirty and to make of dirtiness a virtue, to stand at bench or sink with fitters and washerwomen, to try the habitual and traditional actions of real workmen born and bred in ancient crafts, would have lighted such a candle in the entertainment industry as would not easily have been put out. It will have to be lighted sooner or later in any case, and who could help to do it more effectively than the people who made *North Sea*, *Night Mail*, *Housing Problems*, *Able Seamen*, etc.

Can it be that the guiding minds of documentary allowed early financial restrictions and the largely debased quality of a great deal of English acting to establish for them a principle according to which *all* actors were taboo, instead of trying to discover a small nucleus of actors who could fulfil the requirements of documentary films? Can it be that they were guilty of making necessity a virtue and that they went on to exalt that necessity to a place almost axiomatic in the theory of documentary? And that this partly explains, not only their reluctance to use actors, but their persistent evasion of the focal point in the interpretation of any reality worth the name, I mean the human element? And is it not true that this evasion formed the foundation-stone of the insuperable barrier which grew up between themselves and the commercial cinema?

It is easy to understand how, in the eyes of documentary directors, an untrained or an under-trained performer was thought to be more valuable than a trained one, since training so often connotes trickery and artificiality. The world of documentary is a world in which any method of acting that is not at once solid and subtle, is embarrassingly out of place, and in which the raw material, whatever its deficiences in power and range of expression, at least matches up. But it is all too easily forgotten, in the face of brilliant fragmentary work by non-actors, that it is possible for a sensitive actor to achieve the whole range of understatement so effective and so attractive in non-actors, together with a passion and a concentration and a power of development quite outside the range of his untrained rival, who, however good in other ways, can never master the forms of projection specifically suited to the requirements of camera and microphone, i.e. projection which is a coupling of concentration and intensification of thought and feeling with a technique of shortened aim, the target being in this case the camera instead of the back wall of the gallery.

It must be admitted that responsibility for the early deficiencies in English film-acting rests largely with the directors. Who else could instruct actors in the alarming possibilities of the film camera? It is true that as a class actors do not take kindly to objective thinking, but I would say that the best of them are extremely responsive to sympathetic handling. How many film directors (I am speaking now of the commercial cinema) resisted the temptation to resort to the use of naked power in the studios, to bully, to sneer and generally to undermine the confidence of the actor by making him feel that actors are about as important to the cinema as bird seed? How many directors had either the intelligence or the necessary vocabulary to explain to actors what was required of them? How many knew themselves what was required? And who will say that, even if a director does know what is required in the interpretation of a rôle, it is an easy matter to convey that idea to someone else? Many a good actor is completely tone deaf. Many have no sense of mimicry and cannot copy a practical exposition, however brilliant. Some can accept detailed analysis of a rôle and of its place in the completed picture, others are completely fogged by it. It is for the director to find the touchstone which will reveal to each actor what has to be done and why. Words are not the only symbols of meaning. Many a theatrical amour condemned by the outside world has had its beginnings in the subconscious need of actors and actresses to discover new inspiration, and a new atmosphere of mutual sympathy in which to work.

Karsarvina tells in her autobiography, *Theatre Street*, how the rôle of "Thamar" baffled her throughout the period of rehearsals. Right up to the dress rehearsal she could make no real contact with it. It was the intuition of Diaghileff which finally solved the problem for her. He told her to try joining her eyebrows together in one strong dark line. This did the trick. Tough film directors may think this sort of thing stupid, but to an actress fighting with an unresolved problem, such a small key can unlock the door to the complete revelation. Robert Loraine describes the same sort of thing in his autobiography, how, after battling for weeks with Strindberg's masterpiece, "The Father", Milton Rosmer clarified the whole thing for him by painting the scenery a certain shade of green. This after several repaintings.

But we are in danger of straying from the original question. In all the documentary films that I have seen, and I have seen some dozens in the past three or four weeks apart from isolated examples in the course of ten years' steady cinema going, I think that non-actors achieve all, or at any rate most, that the very best professional actors could achieve in the same circumstances. But this is only because most of these pictures avoid the implications of human action, or, where they do present it, present it in such a fragmentary way as never to put to the test the training and natural qualities which differentiate an actor from a non-actor. It seems to me that in this lies the whole crux of the matter, because when I say that documentary has never faced up to the problem of sustained characterisation and development on the human side of its material, I am simply implying that the leaders of documentary are guilty of a kind of escapism, a deliberate side-stepping of the very central problem in that interpretation of reality which is their avowed aim, I mean Man and his efforts to find his bearings in the universal set-up.

When I think of a trawler or a factory or a school or a mine or a railway or a hospital, I think of people. First people, then what they do, then what they do it with, then what they do it for. Some such order as that, but always people first. After a time I may begin to arrive at some form of generalisation, some theory, some connection with religion or economics or politics. In the end I may, if I have been fairly successful, have in my mind a small fragment of social analysis, or if you like, a small fragment of documentary, imperfect maybe and suffering from the limitations of my training and equipment, but to this extent sound, that it starts from the centre and works a bit of the way outwards. When I saw *North Sea* for the first time a week or two ago, it lifted me out of my seat and the memory of it has persisted clear and strong in my mind despite the many more recent examples of documentary that I have seen since. I attribute this effect, this persistent recollection from a single showing mainly to the fact that *North Sea* dealt more firmly with a set of men grappling with a set of problems than almost any other documentary film I have seen. Not as much focused upon these men as one could have wished perhaps, but still there it was, inescapable. Moreover (this seems to me all-important), they were men who had been more or less carefully established and were thereafter recognisable by the audience. This factor of recognisability is a vital point. If you can make as many members of the audience as possible imagine themselves in the skipper's shoes, you are obviously doubling and redoubling your effect every time the skipper appears on the screen. Take for instance, the sequence of the clearing of the pumps. I suggest that to every householder who has had to cope with a stopped-up sink, that sequence carried an added weight. That is why one remembers it, because it connects with oneself. No cheers, no fake ecstatics as in the commercial cinema—just a bit of pump-cleaning well done, followed by a dispassionate reporting of it to the skipper. No handshakes all round, no "Well done, Buddy." All this seems to bear out my argument.

Of course when you get on to a smallish boat you have to focus more or less upon a few people and upon a small area, because that's what being on a ship means. That itself, is "being-on-a-ship-*ness*". This suggests that the concentration upon the men in *North Sea*, admirable as it is, was unintentional, particularly as it was never

followed up as a theory, and particularly as we meet this quality again most nearly in *Able Seamen*, made more than two years later, but which also takes place on a ship.

When I saw the powerful March of Time epic, *The Ramparts We Watch*, the other day, I was moved and stirred by it, but at the same time it left me unsatisfied, because it seemed to me to evade the full human implications of a polyglot nation being slowly and remorselessly dragged into war. The human beings, quite beautifully presented, were in this case presented as the *background* to the growing crescendo of events, instead of what they must inevitably be in such an analysis—the *foreground*. So, in trying to get closer to the problem of the real human being in documentary, the makers of *The Ramparts We Watch* inverted the whole principle of social analysis. The picture has, of course, many wonderful things in it, which largely compensate for this unconscious backsliding! It is honest, terrifically exciting, and morally and politically always on the target. But I suggest that the ideal framework for such a study would be two families, one American and the other Austrian or German, with sets of interlocking loyalties amongst the children, including a marriage and at least one baby of mixed nationality. Such a framework would in no way weaken the exciting presentation of the international scene and of Moloch let loose. *The Ramparts We Watch* seems to me to present a very clear case for starting at the human end and never quitting it. The odd thing is that one sees the director subconsciously struggling towards this position in film after film. In Alexander's *Our School*, one of the most absorbing pictures I have seen whilst gathering the data for the present study, the most telling moments were those in which two or three of the characters were brought into conflict—a splendid argument between a Bampton Boy and a Londoner, a dark girl talking common sense to a group of schoolfellows, a teacher putting his or her point of view in a meeting, two boys out rabbiting. And always one wished for this partial isolation of recognisable characters to be followed up. To me the conference of teachers was only valuable in so far as it showed that the conference method *was* adopted. Otherwise I would say without hesitation that the ideal starting point would be one of two alternatives, either a single isolated Bampton boy (or girl), established and recognisable, shown as a happy and swiftly developing member of this splendid school, brought into sudden contact with a Londoner of the same age. From this central situation and the problems involved, work outwards towards the general solution. Or, the very same method applied to two teachers. As it is we start with a beautiful countryside, then the school building and then an outline of the system employed there, and only meet here and there, and as though by accident, the tremendous personal drama involved in the novel situation.

I realise, of course, that it is largely a question of economics, and that the isolation of a small group of recognisable people will often entail more careful preparation and greater expense, but this consideration must not deter us from examining its possibilities as a method of approach.

The same method could have been applied with great effect to *Squadron 992*. Isolate a single raw recruit, an ordinary intelligent fellow with a good everyday face and an everyday point of view. What happens to him between the time he joins up and the time he finds himself helping to protect one of our key bridges? None of the excitement would be lost, none of the wonderful photography; the portentous procession of lorries would still be there, but grappled to it "with hoops of steel" the fortunes of every man in the audience.

*Able Seamen* suggests immediately the same treatment. Its very title (plural instead of singular) is a tacit admission of the weakness of which I am speaking. Why avoid the singular and the typical? As a matter of fact in *Able Seamen* Holmes kept closer to his human material than in almost any other documentary film I have seen. That is why it is such a fine film. Whether instinctively or deliberately, he was constantly pulling us back to the men. The weakness, to my mind, was that the interest was spread over too many men. The starting point, as I see it, is this. "Would you like to know just what it means to be a merchant seaman in wartime? Very good. Meet George Wilkins. He's not much to look at and there's nothing very special about him except that he's a damn good sailor and when he starts a job he doesn't let go till it's finished . . . etc." The trouble is, of course, that this concentration upon the isolated typical example calls for actors, and actors of the very finest quality, because now the actor has to carry a great deal of the film where before it could be carried by the background and the setting. But that is the problem which has to be faced.

In addition to the essential rightness, from the social point of view, of starting with people and never leaving them, this concentration upon the central human problem would make for a tremendous increase in simplicity and unity, since it could not fail to make the diverse material of the documentary world far more wieldy. The tendency visible in so many documentaries, to spread valuable material evenly across the screen, would thus be checked, and I suggest that straightforward story-value developed with men and women (not always or entirely actors), and particularly one or two characters articulated for the general mass, forms the rightest as well as nearly always the most effective method for focusing the precise aim and purpose of each film.

It is possible to approach our problem from another direction, namely, by asking what is the difference between the raw human material, docker, tram-driver, grocer, accountant, schoolteacher, etc., and an actor?

First of all, and I think most important, the raw material is nature itself, unmodified by any conscious process except that of editing, when it is not modified itself but involved in a series of juxtapositions with other raw material to form a general concept. This concept is the *director's* modification of reality, not the performer's, and it must be borne in mind that the performance of a non-actor remains unmodified to the end.

The actor, on the other hand, assimilates reality and proceeds to generalise upon it, to quintessentialise it, and re-organise it into an artificial behaviour composed by and through himself. And the point to remember is that the finished product transcends reality, is in fact a kind of *over*-reality, something typical. The actor's task is to exhibit the "*-ness*" of a particular phrase of life, the youthful*ness* of youth, the workmanlike*ness* of a workman, the motherli*ness* of a mother, etc. Thus Chaplin shows us, not just a down-trodden little man, but down-trodden-*ness* itself in its most distilled form. This is very much the same in all the different fields of creation. Cézanne struggles to give us the integral landscape*ness* of a particular landscape, the very still-life-*ness* of a particular still-life.

But the actor holds the key, not only to the assumption of a new character, but to the change and development of that character. It may be a change wrought by a single experience or set of experiences, it may be simply the effect of years. Hamlet, Peer Gynt, Mr. Chips, Anna Karenina may be cited as extreme examples of change and development in dramatic character.

Now what exactly is the use of being able to portray a character which is a living, developing modification and generalisation of reality? To what purpose this power of the actor in its highest and noblest form, this power "to hold a mirror up to nature" (as opposed to simply *being* nature), this power not only to tell the Truth but to extend Truth to a higher Truth?

I suggest that the use of these powers is one of the most forcible ways of evoking an active response in an audience, conscious or subconscious, positive or negative according to the way you use it, of getting a lot of people to behave in a particular way, of calling them to some kind of action. Let us take one or two examples, closely connected with our present life.

In *The Great Dictator* we are shown a lot of very big, very strong, very nasty Storm Troopers, stamping through the Ghetto, smashing windows, pushing people off the sidewalk, knocking over fruit barrows and generally making beasts of themselves. This is a presentation in very simple terms of all that is typical of the Hitler régime. It is a simple exposure of Nazi-*ness*. The yell of delight which goes up when Paulette Goddard, aided and abetted by her barber friend, crowns these merchants one after another with the back of a frying-pan, shows exactly what I mean. For the duration of the film, every member of the audience stands in the shoes of the little fighting barber and his girl friend. They do what we should all like to do, and what we are in fact doing, viz., fighting a lot of bullies. And it would be impossible to exaggerate the effect of such an example of resistance

to brute force in stimulating many millions of English people to fight Fascism to the bitter end.

Now take a very different example, *Pastor Hall*. This picture achieves precisely the same effect only in a more dour and solemn way. It shows the essential beastliness of Fascism just as clearly, and in the midst of this beastliness a single man resisting it with all the force of a fine character. In the end we see him done to death by it, *but only physically*. At the moment of his death he denounces it and points to the future, as thousands of Spaniards and Poles and Czechs have had the courage to do when faced by the firing squad and as some of us may need to do before Fascism is finally crushed.

These films are complementary, and the actors in them, and in many like them, draw the audience irresistibly into participation with them in the events portrayed. For the most powerful way of invoking action is to show people *in* action, people trying to get things *done*. All audiences have a deep subconscious wish to be shown an image of themselves busy solving the problems of life, in such a way as to stimulate them in whatever small degree to corresponding action. Half the force of the New Testament lies in five words, "Tempted like as we are," and the other half in another five, "Go and do thou likewise." I suggest that documentary has never adopted this vital method as a conscious principle, though when it does so unintentionally, as in the bridge-building sequence in *Dark Rapture*, the effect is devastating. No one who saw that sequence could possibly come away without the sense of having been present at a great human achievement and without a heightened conviction of the value of human initiative and endeavour in grappling with the problems of life.

It seems to me that documentary displays with the greatest clarity the material world and the environment in which all our problems have to be solved, that it shows with equal clarity most of the problems themselves, but that it makes little or no attempt to grapple with the most important thing of all, *the act of solution*. To this extent documentary is a passive rather than an active medium. But I suggest that true social analysis can have only one object—action towards the solution of the problems analysed. And I further suggest that these inescapable social and propagandist aims can best be served, from the screen point of view, by a marriage of documentary as we know it, with a more and ever more human story value and by an ever-increasing concentration upon people. And that this can be best achieved by the isolation of particular typical people, and that for this purpose actors trained to portray the development of human character and the intensification of thought and feeling that go with it, will have to be used more and more.

The use of the commentator in documentary is itself a tacit admission that the question of action is only being side-stepped, since a commentator, except in pure instructional and educational films, is mostly doing indirectly what could be done far better by the direct method.

It appears from our very brief and insufficient analysis, that in documentary film, man is nearly always implicit but rarely explicit. It seems that documentary insists upon placing the major emphasis upon circumstances and environment and only by inference upon the human being as an individual. I contend that this is a limitation and a cul-de-sac which documentary directors will sooner or later find themselves forced to revolt against. Man's hopes, his doubts, his fears, his yearnings, his aspirations, his "to be or not to be that is the question"—from all these documentary seems to turn away—only the economic and natural forces which condition his behaviour and set the scene of the struggle, but never the struggle itself. Always the circumference, never the centre. "And the Word was made *flesh*", "I see *men* as trees walking", "What a piece of work is a *man*. . . . In motion how like an *angel!* In apprehension how like a *god!*"

It seems to me that already these facts are being grasped on a wide scale. Already the moguls of the commercial cinema are beginning to cash in upon the documentary principle and may be expected shortly to throw sophistication overboard in exchange for reality. They will, of course, do it from purely commercial motives, doing "the right deed from the wrong reason". Pictures like *The Long Voyage Home* show how

(*Continued on page* 74.)

**REACH EXECUTIVES through**

*BIG BUSINESS MEN already realise the importance of Documentary as part of their general advertising scheme.*

*WORLD'S PRESS NEWS reaches National Advertising executives. They want to know YOU.*

*Link up with them through*

**WORLD'S PRESS NEWS**

112, Fetter Lane, London, E.C.4

TELEPHONE: CHA. 8899. TELEGRAMS: COSMOPRES, LONDON

ADVERTISEMENT MANAGER C. CARLTON COLLINS

**WorldsPressNews**

special

Documentary Film

Supplements

tremendous the effect can be. If the process goes on without a counter-attack, documentary as we know it, may find itself short-circuited and relegated to the level of sales talks, nature study, travelogues and instructionals. I suggest that the position can best be turned and the omissions of the past made good, by the deliberate addition of story value plus actors to documentary. In this way the gulf between documentary and the commercial cinema might soon be bridged (in fact half a dozen exciting documentary story films made with actors could not help but bridge it) and documentary directors, unrivalled in the apprehension of reality, be called to conference in Wardour Street, to put on heaters with the elect and to bring an ever-increasing measure of integrity and basic reality into the English cinema.

# CORRESPONDENCE

## FILMS COMMISSION

SIR: It is a pity that such a usually well-informed publication as DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER has condemned the Board of Trade proposals for regenerating the film industry on evidence which bears so little relation to the facts. It would have been better to reserve judgment till the facts were available rather than accept the trade press reports and other sources of "inside" information on the President of the Board of Trade's invitation to trade representatives to discuss in confidence an outline of his proposals. Maybe it is unfortunate that this meeting was of a private nature—but it is difficult to imagine how else the reactions of trade representatives could be obtained at such an early stage in the formulation of proposals. As to your statements, I would point out that:

(1) I am confident the proposals have not reached the stage of naming the commissioners. Certainly neither the names you mention nor any others were given; but I do feel that, whoever the commissioners are to be, we should not let their names—whether welcome or disliked—prevent us from considering objectively the principles of any proposals outlined.

(2) Why should the renters be consulted at this stage—if at all—in the proposals? The plans concern production primarily, and we all know that American interests—which must suffer inversely to the growth of British production—are not entirely disassociated from that section of our industry. Was Henry Ford consulted about the McKenna duties?

(3) Leading officials of the C.E.A. were present for the very purpose you mention, namely consultation. And as to the question of the desirability of a Films Commission I have strong recollections of certain members of Parliament who were generally accredited with expressing the viewpoint of exhibitors, making strong pleas for a Films Commission in the House during the Quota Act debates.

(4) You judge the Board of Trade upon a list of mythical names, ignoring the main fact that at last a Government Department has decided to go ahead with proposals to help the industry. Coming at a time like the present (with the danger of the industry's personnel being irretrievably lost to the industry) I regard it as an indication that at least one Government Department is anxious to preserve the industry and prevent a repetition of the catastrophe which befell it as a result of the last war. The recent Parliamentary statement by the President of the Board of Trade concerning reservation of labour bears this out.

(5) You completely overlook the suggestion for a Films Credit Corporation, a most important proposal, allied to the Films Commission, and stressed with equal emphasis by the President of the Board of Trade at his meeting with the trade.

Carping criticism has injured the industry before now. At the present time I feel any proposals which cannot be detrimental to the industry should be welcomed (and I am sure you will class the present proposals as such) and our efforts should be directed to constructive criticism to make any such plans as advantageous as possible. A.C.T. has endeavoured to do this, and its General Council is asking its Eighth Annual General Meeting to endorse them in principle (while drawing attention to the fact that such proposals cannot solve the problems of the industry as they leave its general structure intact and are completely useless without reservation of the necessary man-power) and to press for the following specific points:

(*a*) **Films Commission:**

(i) One representative to be a nominee, with sympathetic knowledge of employees' problems i.e., a trade unionist from the industry.

(ii) One member of technical as well as production and managerial experience of the industry.

(iii) Consultation with the appropriate trade unions in the administration of Section 34 of the Films Act—the Fair Wages Clause.

(iv) The proposed Advisory Council to contain an equal representation of employers and employees.

(v) Satisfactory means of contact between the Advisory Council and the Films Commission, with machinery for the trade unions to make direct representation to the latter body.

(vi) Provision for safeguarding the national interest by regular public reporting and control, including opportunity for public scrutiny of accounts of the Bank and of production, distribution and exhibition of the films financed.

(*b*) **Films Credit Corporation:**

(i) Observance of Section 34 of the Cinematograph Films Act to be a condition of financial assistance to producers.

(ii) Increase in the capital of Bank to a more practical figure.

(iii) Only British production interests (and not American) to utilise the Bank.

(iv) The policy of the Bank be designed to foster continuous production.

(v) Provision for a technical check on productions financed.

If we can get these, most of your fears will be overcome. I am sure the many A.C.T. members amongst your readers will help us in this with their customary energy and ability.

Yours faithfully,

THE ASSOCIATION OF CINE-TECHNICIANS

GEO. H. ELVIN

*General Secretary*

# FILM SOCIETY NEWS

The output of the **Scottish Film Council's** Central Film Library has been growing steadily during the past few months; 1,700 reels of film were issued during the month of February, and this monthly total is likely to be exceeded during March.

Following the publication of the Advisory Committee's Report on the Production of Educational Films the Council, in collaboration with the Scottish Educational Film Association, has now set up a Committee to investigate the use of 16 mm. sound films. The terms of reference of the Committee are as follows: "To determine whether there are any types of educational films in which, apart from practical or other difficulties, the use of sound of any kind would be an undoubted advantage; to consider whether these practical or other difficulties are in all or any cases of sufficient magnitude to outweigh the advantages; and hence to determine the extent to which the provision and use of substandard sound films for education whether in school, college or university or in the wider fields of social, religious and medical education and industrial training, is reasonable or desirable". It is hoped to complete the investigation by the end of 1942.

Some months ago the Ministry of Information installed projectors in six Scottish Public Libraries. Programmes of M.O.I. films are supplied every second week. To preserve continuity of showing during the "blank" weeks the Council have been supplying programmes of outstanding documentary films. A typical programme provided by the Council is "Social Problems" which consists of the following films: *Cine Magazine*, *Smoke Menace*, *Enough to Eat* and *Children at School*. Small groups of enthusiasts attached to each Library, under the convenership of the Librarian, have ensured the smooth running of shows and the Libraries are gradually becoming civic film centres. At the same time librarians have skilfully linked up the films shown, with the books available on the subjects. The whole scheme is co-ordinated by a joint committee of the Scottish Library Association and the Scottish Film Council on which the M.O.I. is represented by the Regional Film Officer.

The 5th and 6th issues of the Scottish Educational Film Review have just been published. The 5th issue, which has been produced in co-operation with the Scottish Churches' Film Guild, is devoted entirely to religious films.

# FILM SOCIETY NEWS (*continued*)

It has been in much demand by churches throughout Scotland.

A new section—"Class-room Films", has been added to this year's Scottish Amateur Film Festival, the Final Adjudication of which takes place in the Lyric Theatre, Glasgow, on Saturday, 19th April. A cup for this class has been presented by Mr. R. M. Allardyce, Director of Education for Glasgow, while the annual prize of £5 is being donated by the Scottish Educational Film Association. Despite wartime restrictions entries for the Festival are coming in steadily and there is good reason to hope that the high standard of previous festivals will be maintained.

**The Cambridge University Film Society** has had a successful inaugural season, every seat in the Arts Theatre being sold. Plans for the summer term include *Trois Valses* (April 20th), a talk by Bernard Miles on Film Acting (April 27th) *The Scoundrel* (May 4th) and a programme of short story films on May 18th. *Night Mail*, which is to be shown with *The Scoundrel*, has a special association for Cambridge, as its world premier was at the Arts Theatre, and it was the first film to be shown there when the theatre opened.

**Edinburgh Film Guild's** Polish programme was a great success, and was attended by important members of the Polish Forces in Scotland.

Incidentally, the method adopted of interpolating passages of explanatory commentary in English into the *The Day of the Great Adventure* was highly successful and opens up wide possibilities for film society showings of untitled foreign-language films.

**Dundee and St. Andrews** showed *Ils Etaient Neuf Celibataires* in the final show of their season. The secretary reports that the Society confidently hopes to resume in the autumn.

## SCIENTIFIC FILM SOCIETIES

In addition to the **London Scientific Film Society** (which is having a very successful wartime season) there are now a number of others springing up in different parts of Britain, mainly in University towns such as Cambridge, Aberdeen, Glasgow, etc. The **Aberdeen** Society (Secretary, Mrs. Nan Clow) already has a membership of 250, and gives regular shows. Its terms of reference are stated as follows:

"The object of the Club is to exhibit Educational and Scientific Films which are seldom shown through the usual channels. It is not intended solely for Scientists but is designed to present the results and methods of science to the general public."

**Glasgow** also has an equally lively society (Secretary: Mrs. Ockrent) which, in addition to shows, is also planning its own 16 mm. production on some technical aspects of blood transfusion, under the supervision of professor Blodwen Lloyd.

There are indications that the Scientific Film Society movement is likely to spread to other centres. D.N.L. therefore proposes to devote a special section to Scientific Film Societies each month. We shall be glad to receive full notes and information from all Secretaries, and will also endeavour to answer queries.

There appear to be two important points for immediate consideration. Firstly, there is need for an even wider selection of films by expert viewing panels, and for a rapid means of dissemination of information about suitable films to all interested groups. D.N.L. will help in all possible ways in this matter. Secondly, it is clear that, wherever possible, tie-ups should be arranged between ordinary Film Societies and Scientific Film Societies since they frequently exist together in the same areas. This should be easy to arrange.

# A FRENCH FILM

### *Now Showing at Studio One*

**Circonstances Attenuantes.** *Direction:* Jean Boyer. *Photography:* Armenise. With Michel Simon, Dorville and Suzanne Dantes.

THIS FILM certainly gives you a whiff of good old nostalgia. Not that it is anything more than a competent job, but it stands well in the old French tradition and reminds you of all that their cinema used to give us, which we shall never see again. I had not heard the names of any of the technicians before, excepting Yves Mirande, though of course most of the cast was familiar; but so strong used the French studio working tradition to be, that all the well-known details of technique are as usual—the fluid camera movement, the luminous and realistic photography, the (except for one) first-class set construction, the good keen edge of the acting, and, I'm afraid, the shallowness of the theme.

Michel Simon, a middle-aged Parisian judge, sets off for Plombières on holiday with his wife. Their chauffeur, who suspects that his girl is carrying on with the butcher boy, stages a car breakdown just outside Paris, so that he can dash back and catch them in the act. He lands in jail, so, as the evening draws on, Michel Simon and his wife make their way to the local pub, kept by Dorville. A meal heavily flavoured with garlic and shallots and washed down with plenty of Beaujolais, soon makes them drunk and on good terms with the locals, who divide their time between petty theft and pimping. On the evidence of subsequent criminal exploits, I should say the locals would have done better to concentrate on the latter. Next morning Michel Simon feels so well after his booze-up that he decides to stay on, to see how the other half lives, while his wife is quite willing too, having her eye on one of the younger blokes who wears a most amazing cap and has "nice eyes". The lads can't quite make out Michel Simon, thinking that they've seen him before, as indeed most of them have; but when he gets Dorville, who has been arrested, out of gaol, he becomes quite a hero and is invited to join the gang. By the simple ruse of paying for what they take Michel Simon engineers a few coups, including the burglary of his own house, to rid himself of his wife's selection of knick-knacks. A nice touch here is his discovery of his chauffeur who has seized the opportunity of the family being away to entertain his girl, in the best bedroom. "Mind you change the sheets," says Michel Simon good-humouredly, as he leaves them to it. But the girl of one of the lads returns from a three months' stretch, recognises him as the judge who sent her up, and the fat is in the fire. At first it looks like being a beating-up, but Michel Simon (always a good spieler and nicknamed Le Sentencier) talks himself out of it, and the rest into "honest" work.

All this is very pleasant; done very amusingly and with great good-humour, with a certain cynical touch and yet with quite a warmth of human feeling. Michel Simon, Dorville and the rest, though by no means in their best rôles, do well as ever, and the whole film carries with it, as most French films did, a great feeling for the possibilities of life and for the individual's opportunities in it. You feel that here is a world where, imperfect though it is, the individual can by his own choice and effort, become happy. Unfortunately we all know now that this is not true: man cannot pull himself up by his own bootlaces. And it is in the lack of realisation of just this that French films, excepting only a few of the very best, let us down. In point of fact the moral of this film could easily be taken in exactly the opposite way. Judging from their various final performances as taxi-driver, newspaper seller, respectable young husband and father, and market-stall traders, I should have said these people would have been far happier as crooks, and that the moral of the film was that you got more fun out of dishonesty than honesty.

Some priggish people have attributed the fall of France to the French people's loose morals, to the fact that they kept mistresses, and in general to their cheerful, humorously cynical and warmly human attitude towards life. Well, no doubt Pétain is trying to knock all that out of them and give them, instead, lashings of nationhood, blood, land, work, and all the other masochist-fascist trimmings. I thought everybody learned better from Germany around 1932. By taking the path they then did, the Germans no doubt assured themselves an easy get-out and a comfortable time for the next decade or so. In the realist spirit of the French people, in fact, lies the only hope of any true "new order", if only that spirit is allied to a real social consciousness. It is the same spirit that we find in Shakespeare or Fielding or Handel or Zola or Van Gogh, or (in Germany), in Mozart or Beethoven or Pabst—a creative view of the possibilities of human life. And a few French films did have it—Renoir sometimes, Feyder sometimes (*Les Nouveaux Messieurs*). But even without the essential social realisation, give me the spirit of *La Bandera* or *Le Rosier de Madame Husson* before the sadist masochist mysticism of *Das Mädchen Johanna* or *The Old and the Young King*. We know which has staying power, which will win out in the long run. Good luck to France, she can afford to wait.

# NEWS FROM CANADA

OTTAWA, MARCH 3RD. The resignation of John Grierson as Film Commissioner has not yet been accepted. On his November announcement stating his intention to "hand over to Canadians", there was a prompt and continuous Press response urging that he be retained. In view of the Prime Minister's announcements of his special interest in the retention of Mr. Grierson in Canada for further development of the National Film Board, it is indicated that he will stay on for at least some months.

The imminence of an offensive is creating interest here in new English films showing the present state of preparation and readiness for attack. There is general demand for films about Canadian troops and services in England, to convey a more complete and substantial picture than Press coverage can do. As a result, expectations are high regarding the new film on Canadian forces, on order in London, and there is considerable disappointment at the reported delay in production.

The Canadian part in Empire defence strategy has been the subject of January and February releases in the wartime *Canada Carries On* series (National Film Board). *Guards of the North* pictured Canadian troops in Iceland, and appeared here the week before the reported German raid on Reykjavik. *Everywhere in the World*, produced in Canada, is the first film to present a full account of Empire defence strategy. It sketches the rôle of each young nation in the Commonwealth—in supply, in fighting services, and in performance. It is concerned too with the part of U.S.A. in democratic defence, as the most powerful of today's young nations. The picture finds its theme in the Roosevelt speech on the four freedoms—freedom of speech, freedom to worship, freedom from want and fear, "everywhere in the world."

*Peoples of Canada* (March release) breaks new ground in Canadian production. It presents for the first time a picture of just that, the people of Canada. Their largest single group is the Catholic French. Scotch, Scandinavian, English, Ukrainian, Irish, are largest among the other highly diverse racial groups who have settled in this country and are represented in the film. The theme is the tradition of tolerance which has underscored all foreign settlement in this country.

Subsequent pictures in the Film Board's war series will operate on a new tack. From literal accounts of Canada's fighting services and specific wartime policies, they will extend to an evaluation of Canada's part in integrated, world-wide war strategy for democratic defence. The objective is to expand the idea of participation in war, from a literal conception of soldiers and airmen to a wider grasp of whole national effort, making equal demands and putting equal responsibility on the whole citizen body.

Projected films in this schedule will include one on metals, in which this country's Laurentian Shield is immensely rich. There will be a film on research, the shaping of war strategy by scientific discovery; this is to be made with the co-operation of the National Research Council, and has specific reference to scientific research in Canada and its application.

Another film will treat railways in war, the adjustment and expansion of rail services to carry war production. This is a particularly relevant subject here, where railway building was a first condition of confederation, and subsequently, in building and fusing the separate regions of the country. Hemisphere defence, the question of bases and two-ocean defence needs in the Western world, Canada's responsibility here as a North American nation, provides the theme for another film in this series. And there will shortly be a picture on women's organisations in wartime, in special and auxiliary services.

Another definite direction in Film Board policy has been attention to war visitors—troops and groups from all the Commonwealth, transferred to Canada for wartime duty. This has been seen in *Children from Overseas*, designed largely for the parents of British children shipped to Canada for safe keeping.

At present there is a picture planned of Australians and New Zealanders who have come here under the Air Training Scheme; it will be made as much for showing in the Antipodes as in Canada.

**MUSIC FOR FILMS**
**SINCE 1910**
**DIRECTION = COMPOSITION = SOUND TRACK**
**LIBRARY = RECORDS**

*Some Composers and Collaborators*

RONALD BINGE • YORK BOWEN • HUBERT BATH • BAYNTON POWER • WALTER COLLINS • ALBERT CAZABON • H. M. FARRAR • JOSEF HOLBROOKE • LOUIS MORDISH • JOHNNY HEYKENS • HUGO DE GROOT • JOAN FRESCO • CHARLES ANCLIFFE • KONSTANTINOFF • VICTOR WILLIAMS • ROBERT STILL • WALTER WARREN • ETC.

**DE WOLFE**
GERRARD 2992/3
HUDSON RECORD CO.
80/82 WARDOUR St., LONDON W1
LICENCES FOR ALL COUNTRIES

SIGHT & SOUND
(British Film Institute)

Trials of the Exhibitor

Propaganda Values

SPRING ISSUE ORDER NOW

# EX PARTE

**By GEORGE PEARSON, one of the earliest and most successful pioneers in the development of the British Film Industry.**

I AM NOT a critic of the documentary film. A few months in an unobtrusive corner of the movement, after thirty years in the commercial studios of Europe and America disproportionately colours judgment. I am a wishful thinker by the viewing of countless documentaries and an inspiring contact with young men destined for leadership, and others whose proved skill is today making documentary screen history. All are enthusiasts in a great cause.

It is because of the few films that have gripped me, touched the heart and left me wondering, that I dare write of those others that depress me. I have listened to the theories that fostered them, to much strange dogma, to a welter of fine phrases and slogans that awe me by their profundity but confuse me as to meaning.

"Creative interpretation of reality," for example, embraces every known art, yet I discover, in the specific art of the screen, a strange inhibition in its application to many documentaries. I become a little impatient, a little regretful. I admire the good things in documentary, but cannot forgive the bad. A spate of verbal hurly-burly may make for better understanding, may bring divergent views to convergence towards the advancement of the documentary we each serve with equal loyalty.

To our muttons! Why "documentary"? A fearsome word conjuring up folios, pamphlets. letters, dossiers and books; words *not* pictures. Has it by evil chance affected subject treatment, misguiding towards a literary shape impeding the mobility and virility of the moving living scene. Why "non-theatrical"? Presumably it predicates the non-fictional quality of the documentary, but to lay minds it unfortunately implies "non-entertainment" a completely suicidal attribute.

Enough of nomenclature. The film itself is what matters. Its form, its content, its purpose. Instantly I am confused by many types—scenic, travel, industrial, instructional, newsreel, cultural, propaganda. Whether documentary embraces all is arguable, but to me the only form that is true documentary is designed to treat contemporary life in terms of cinema Art through cinema Technique, shaped to convey a world message definite and worth while.

This is the one film form that is legitimate heir of cinema, for which all other forms, commercial, fictional, theatrical, are merely blazing the trail. With daring screen vision America has demonstrated this with her creed-breaking convention-flouting *Grapes of Wrath* and *Our Town*. Does this revelation of the documentary in fulness, for such these are, arouse a white-hot enthusiasm; or does it disturb those who would masochistically bear a cross for a creed, that, by its inhibitions, confines its followers to an esoteric cul-de-sac, through muddled thinking?

I am told, forcibly, that the splendid thing about documentary is its restriction to realities. In this indisputable? Take the classic example of a recognised documentary success *North Sea*. Real fisherfolk, yes! Real atmosphere, yes! Real backgrounds, yes! Real incident, no! Those fine folk of the film enacted an incident out of past experience, re-lived events as though happening at the moment. Success came from apparent reality due to direction, and performance, and perfection in filmic shape.

You will admit this dramatisation was "acted", but only in the documentary form of naturalistic interpretation. This is muddled thinking, for you abhor "acting" as such, but accept it if re-labelled. You admit a principle of screencraft, but would inhibit its full application. What is all acting but interpretation of life? *North Sea* gripped me by its inherent emotionalism, whilst scores of documentaries have chilled me by their repression of this vital attribute. Their text-book quality refuses to admit that life is nothing but a swift unbroken succession of emotional impulses of infinite gradation, stretching through feeling, to knowing and willing. To feel, to know, to will—there is life's psychological sequence. And life is the very marrow of your films.

It is curious that you should employ music as emotional stimulant to scenes that, otherwise, would lack that vital quality. The truth is that you are scared of visualised emotion as a cat of water; classing all sentiment as sentimentality, all strong feeling as studio hokum. You deplore the prejudice of a mass cinema that berates your work as lacking entertainment, but fail to see that entertainment is nothing more than the gripping of the emotions that urge the swift attack on mind. Avid for the applause of an emotional crowd, you would offer them unemotional documents.

Yet you are blessed with a stage embracing all the world; with all its peoples your performers, and emotional life in the living, as your material. I fear you look with suspicion on the basic formula of the theatrical studio. . . . "Build your film, emotion by emotion." That formula has evolved from a thousand-year-old tradition of a drama that began with the common folk reacting to contemporary life and thought; conditions very little removed from your own, today. And you have the majesty of the illimitable screen for your amphitheatre!

If ever you will accept the wisdom of that formula, be sure you read it aright. Emotion by emotion; yes, but the emotional progression must not remain in the performer or scene; it must be transmitted in fulness to the spectator. Countless theatrical films have failed from this error alone. There are many precepts as to this transmission obeyed by the great screen interpreters of life, such as Spencer Tracy or Jean Gabin. They are common screencraft knowledge and worthy of application.

You will say I have an emotional bee in my bonnet. Well, I warned you my judgment was coloured. In the light of that reiteration it may be forgiven me if I find it easier to conclude my wishful thinking, arrived at by analysis of those films that depressed me, through the medium of an imagined talk to a director about to start a documentary.

"You are about to make a film in unrestricted documentary form. You will avoid those errors, as I see them, that mar the structure of your work. Your first essential is purpose, for that decides the shape. This, in essence, is the clear alignment of sequences each with definite intention, each moving unerringly to its successor, all travelling with increasing force towards the goal—the crashing emotional impact of the film message in finality. Now begins the intriguing arrangement of content.

With the same perfect synchronisation that the movements of a Walt Disney symphony march with melody, your visual scene progression should march with emotion. If your emotional continuity is as clear in your mind as a musical composition, how easy it will be for you to select your scenic visual continuity. Your editor will thank you; for he cuts to an emotional scaffolding if he is a master of his craft.

Nothing must be accepted that interferes with forward story movement. Can you imagine the disastrous effect of a pedagogic interpolation in *North Sea* of the details of deep sea fishery! Shape and content firmly fixed; complete understanding between director and cameraman, and filming begins. And now the elusive sirens sing. Many a scene will be shot outside your content, only to be juggled with on the cutting bench, to no purpose. The accidental shot that pleases only the director, is more dangerous than dynamite. It belongs or it does not. The screen is for an audience in mass. That must ever be the director's acid test of value. Scene, performance and setting, must present their full purport aright. There is no art in photographing reality if clarity is thereby sacrificed.

Those dreadful pictures of real people in their real surroundings, who by their obvious self-consciousness make the spectator squirm, are not interpreters of truth merely because they are real. Between being natural and appearing natural there may have to be a bridge of art.

Be wary of symbolism unless it is in your scene, not parallel with it. Your crippled soldier is in the crowd that watches the pageant of marching men—to move from the one to the other is banal.

Use dramatic contrast with impunity. Note the verbal skill in Churchill's magnificent phrase of the many and the few. Apply this principle to scene, and to life. Mountain and valley—crowds and solitude—laughter and tears, in swift suc-

cession. This is emotional attack, the root foundation of your craft.

Seize every adjunct of screen art. Music, for mood excitant; sound, to augment emotion; selected dramatic speech to crystallize the casual vernacular: visual scene—dominant factor throughout.

Let the Art Director's design illuminate your setting—even in real exterior, if such is enhanced thereby. What matters it if reality is modified to give greater clarity to visual scene. Are you content to be mere recorder, or are you interpreter through Art? Remember Blake's bold plea that Art is a language for conveying impassioned thought and feeling; which takes up the objects of sense as a means to this end, owing them no allegiance."

In all I have uttered I claim no superior knowledge; all is but conclusion reached by examination of film structures I mistrust. But, however contentious much may seem, though voiced in sincerity; there is one final thought the truth of which must be beyond all dispute—this present moment of world crisis is most pregnant for good or ill in the documentary movement. We live in amazing times without precedent in human history. Realism is crashing at our doors, enveloping our lives as we move through each day's effort, in hourly bewilderment at the swiftly passing events. Humanity in conflict with humanity; devouring itself and its resources, seeking blindly for a solution to its terrifying problems.

Hearts in mass, responsive to every emotion; heads moved by hearts that stir to every impulse. The whole world a stage of chaotic confusion. Is not this the moment for documentary screen art to grasp the living material that surges round us like a maelstrom, to illuminate it, interpret it, magnify it; that all may see it for what it is—the human soul fighting for its existence against a savagery beyond human conception, that would destroy it utterly.

What matters it whether such screen fare is theatrical or otherwise, so long as the message is clear and rushes from heart to head, and strengthens will, emboldens courage, and fortifies faith.

Seize the hour that is yours. Reject nothing of screen art that makes for screen greatness. Demonstrate your terrific advantage of the living present as material, and break all bonds of inhibiting creeds that bind fulness of effort. Every documentary short can be a miniature *Grapes of Wrath*, with far more intensive emotional force. Let documentary be minstrel to humanity through an art founded on laws of entertainment that are basic, fundamental, and permanent. This is the vision. It will not pass away if we have the courage of a faith that calls for action.

# NEWS FROM U.S.A.

REPORTS from Washington on Robert Flaherty's production, *The Land*, are that the silent cutting is nearing completion and that both the commentary and the music have been started. The commentary is being written by Russell Lord, Government authority on soil erosion, who has recently published several books on that subject. Several trial recordings of parts of the commentary have already been made. Richard Arnold, young composer who recently made his radio debut with N.B.C., has been hired to write the score.

Lora Hays reports that she is in the process of making three educational shorts from the footage not used in the theatrical production, *Power and the Land*, made for the Rural Electrification Administration. R.E.A. officials have become so enthusiastic over the success of this venture that two of the three films, all of which were originally scheduled as silent films, have had sound budgets allotted to them and on the first one Douglas Moore, composer for *Power and the Land*, is doing a piano score. The subjects of these three 16 mm. shorts are:

1 What Electricity Means to the Farm Youth of America—showing the advantages offered to young people in the country with the coming of electricity.
2 Fire—showing the great fire hazards on an unelectrified farm and how these are removed with the coming of electricity.
3 Hardships of Farm Life without Electricity—showing how electricity lightens the burden of farm work both in the home and in the fields.

On January 12th the Composer's League presented a novel evening at the Museum of Modern Art, titled Music and Film. The programme included excerpts from six films, *Valley Town*, *Roots in the Earth*, *The City*, *One Tenth of Our Nation*, *Power and the Land*, and *The River*. The composers of the scores of each of these, respectively Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Douglas Moore and Virgil Thomson, appeared to talk about the job of writing film music. All of the composers agreed that documentary films had proved a promising medium for the modern composers since the producers are receptive to the experimental ideas of the composer and not bound by the restrictions and prejudices common in Hollywood production. Aaron Copland went a little further in saying that as a matter of fact the value of documentary to the composer was that it gave him evidence with which to impress Hollywood. According to Howard Taubman of *The Times* the "films and music proved beyond question that the talents of these composers could be employed to advantage in Hollywood. Mr Copland has, in fact, seen the promised land, . . . but there is nothing to be ashamed of in writing music for documentaries, they are often richer and truer than some ornate fables. The dawn to dusk excerpt in *Power and the Land* filmed by Joris Ivens was stirring cinema; so was the rolling mills sequence from *Valley Town;* so was the traffic sequence from *The City;* so was the flood sequence from *The River*."

The programme of documentary films at Columbia University continues. On February 10th Alice Keliher spoke on documentary films and education. This was followed on February 24th by Jean Lenauer, whose subject was "Peoples of the Earth". The films shown were *North Sea*, the popular G.P.O. production of 1938, and Luis Bunuel's famous *Land Without Bread*.

Recently a group of 17 enlisted soldiers, sailors, marines and coastguardsmen reported to 369 Lexington Avenue to begin an intensive seven months' course in the March of Time's "School of Pictorial Journalism". Carefully chosen from the four armed services, they will eventually form a corps of military photographers whose job, like that of the famous cinema corps of the German army, will be to record the progress of American arms.

Under the command of Producer Louis de Rochemont (Lieutenant, U.S.N., resigned), Associate Producer Tom Orchard (Lieutenant (jg), U.S.N.R.) and Ensign Alan Brown (U.S.N.R.), they will be assigned with regular March of Time production crews from whose directors and cameramen they will learn field work first hand. In New York they will attend regular lectures delivered, not only by M.O.T. technicians and editors, but by representatives from camera and film manufacturing companies, by well-known newsreel cameramen and by experts in the documentary field. A revolving schedule will give each man a two months' spell in the cutting room and the laboratory.

While the Government pays subsistence allowances and travelling expenses to each man and furnishes each group with a camera and film, March of Time feels it is contributing in a practical manner to that part of National Defence which it knows best, by giving these picked service men a sound foundation in the technique of the film of reality.

STANLEY IRVING.

Director of Short Subjects

*Recently completed script commissioned by M.O.I.*

23 PEMBRIDGE SQ.
LONDON, W.2

BAYswater 1461 or
Maidenhead 1848

RFU

Spring, the sweet spring, is the year's pleasant king,
Then blooms each thing, then maids dance in a ring,
Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

The palm and may make country houses gay,
Lambs frisk and play, the shepherds pipe all day,
And we hear aye birds tune this merry lay:—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

Fields breathe sweet, daisies kiss our feet,
Young lovers meet, old wives a-sunning sit,
In every street these tunes our ears do greet:—
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!

Spring, the sweet spring!

REALIST FILM UNIT LTD.

*New Address:* 47 OXFORD STREET, W.1

TEL. GERRARD 1958/9

# "THE SERVING ARMY"

*The achievements of the Salvation Army in LONDON'S WORST "BLITZED" AREAS*

## NOW SHOWING AT RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL NEW YORK

*This is the first British short to play at Radio City, the largest cinema in the world*

*PRODUCED BY*

# STRAND FILMS

---

## THE STRAND FILM COMPANY LTD.

DONALD TAYLOR, MANAGING DIRECTOR.

5a UPPER ST. MARTIN'S LANE, W.C.2. Merton Park Studios: 269 KINGSTON ROAD, S.W.19


*Owned and published by Film Centre Ltd., 34 Soho Square, London, W.1, and printed by Simson Shand Ltd., the Shenval Press, London and Hertford*